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"The Soviet Problem in Managing the East Europeans
in an East-West Conflict"

Assessments made by NATO planners and by US planners usually assume that 1) a war with the Soviet Union would erupt suddenly with little warning and almost always assume 2) that all of the members of the Warsaw Pact (as well as NATO) participate in the conflict.

The grounds on which these assumptions rest are that they may be correct and that they put maximum stress on NATO's ability to defend. Therefore they are prudent planning assumptions. However, for several reasons, it is doubtful that such assumptions are in fact prudent ones. One is that the planners seem always to conclude that NATO loses (or a nuclear war results which is also an unappealing prospect). This conclusion arguably has had a progressively demoralizing effect on the West and induces neutralism among the Europeans. Another is that it causes us not to pay enough attention to opportunities that might, indeed are likely, to present themselves. For instance, a European war very likely would be preceded by a period of crisis. During such a period both sides would be mobilizing and domestic and international political and economic maneuvering would occur within and between West and East. For the Soviets a principal aim would be to assure the participation of the Eastern Europeans in a conflict. For the West, the opposite would presumably be a crucial goal, that is to minimize the likelihood of such participation.

These considerations suggest several questions; for instance, How might the East European peoples and governments behave during a severe East-West crisis? Under what circumstances might various East Europeans

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cooperate with the Soviets? How would the Soviets try to control the East Europeans before and during a war and what cost? What confidence do the Soviets have of their ability to manage in various circumstances? and, What might we do to reduce their confidence? Such questions have not received enough attention.

In addressing these questions one should keep in mind that a paramount consideration is the Soviet perspective on them.

A place to start is by observing that a large majority of the East Europeans want to be free of domination by the Soviet Union. (The exceptions are that minority which benefits from Soviet control.) This control has been challenged on several occasions since 1945 -- most recently by the rise of Solidarity -- and has failed to be maintained in two countries, Yugoslavia and (less decisively) Romania. But Soviet dominance has been sustained in the key countries in the north and center.

The ability of the Soviets to maintain control in the key countries in the absence of an East-West conflict is a different matter from assuring that the East Europeans will do the Soviets bidding in such a conflict. Consider the following set of war outbreak possibilities:

- a Warsaw Pact "bolt-out-of-the-blue" attack on NATO
- a Warsaw Pact attack, or threat of attack, on Europe stemming from a conflict elsewhere, especially the Middle East

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- a conflict begun by Soviet pressure on Berlin or on a single NATO member such as Norway or Turkey
- a conflict triggered by an uprising in Eastern Europe, especially the DDR.

In the last three of these contingencies an extended period of crisis and mobilization might occur.

In such circumstances what would be the interest of most East Europeans in cooperating with the Soviets? The contingencies listed above do not seem likely to raise the spectre of German revanchism -- a prospect which might unite the East -- with the possible exception of the last one; e.g., an uprising in the DDR which results in an FRG intervention and an attempted de facto unification of the two Germanies; but this is an unlikely case. What is most plausible to assume in most war outbreak circumstances is a sharp divergence of interests. To these should be added the point that NATO could make it clear to Eastern Europe that it would suffer great damage in an East-West war and that if the Soviets prevailed over the West the East Europeans would probably find such freedoms as they now have greatly curtailed.

In short, if the East Europeans were in a position to choose, a large majority would probably opt for neutralism, some might see such a conflict as providing an opportunity (for themselves personally or for their country) to become free of Soviet control, and some would no doubt support the Soviets out of conviction.

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Moscow's Management of the East Europeans. To Moscow it is of the utmost importance that the East Europeans cooperate. Not only do they supply about one-third of the ground forces and one-fourth of the air forces that would be used against NATO, but they also sit athwart the Soviet lines of communication. The Soviets probably need the active participation of these forces in order to do well against NATO forces and hostility on the part of significant portions of the East European forces and populations could produce disaster for them.

It seems plausible to assume that they would use the following techniques among others to try to assure such cooperation:

- placing Soviet or "loyal" East European personnel in key military and political positions and removing unreliable ones
- preempting control over communications and intelligence organizations and channels
- occupying key political and logistic nodes with Soviet or reliable East European units need to be worked through in some detail. How many people and/or units might be involved in such Soviet operations? How long would they take to carry out? Might there be open resistance on the part of some East Europeans? How much

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of this activity would we be able to detect?

What constraints might these requirements impose on Soviet operations against NATO, etc.?

Soviet Perceptions. Aside from a more or less objective assessment of the Soviet's management problem, we need to consider the likely Soviet perception of this problem. One might make the following guesses as to how the Soviets might assess their prospects:

- The behavior of the East European military and the civilian populations during a crisis or conflict with the West, especially a prolonged one, is of grave concern to Moscow and it will be conservative in assessing the likelihood of resistance, passive and active
- In order to minimize the incidence of East European deviant behavior, the Soviets would try to shape events so as to portray NATO -- and especially the Federal Republic of Germany -- as the aggressor. (On the other hand, the Soviets might hesitate in portraying events in this way given the possibility -- even if remote -- that many East Europeans would react positively to the news that NATO forces were on the move)

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- The Soviets see a compelling need for early successes in order to establish an aura of invincibility; conversely early Soviet difficulties (or NATO successes) might resonate, be amplified in the East, and cause widespread defections and resistance
- It is also important to convince the NATO governments of the inevitability of Warsaw Pact success; whatever the private doubts of the Moscow regime, all means must be used to project confidence in early as well as ultimate success; exercises play a role in the projection of such confidence
- Although the West has strictly refrained from encouraging the East Europeans to resist the Soviets in past crises or to help them materially, the Soviet leadership doesn't count on such forbearance in all future circumstances; it does not exclude Western

political agitation and material support to
the East Europeans in an East-West conflict

From the US-West European perspective:

- These considerations could constrain Soviet options in a number of respects:
 - in the assignment of Pact forces; e.g., by not putting Polish units in contact with US, UK, or French ones; by forcing them to assign Soviet units to safeguard rear areas, etc.
 - by taking actions which makes an attack from a standing start difficult to execute
- NATO promises to spare those European countries that stay out of the war might evoke favorable responses; advance publicity on this policy might be in order. (Discussions on such Western actions have taken place at the NATO MOD ministerial level.)

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- Preparations in the West evidently directed at collaboration with and support for East Europeans will intensify Soviet concerns about the behavior of the East Europeans and induce caution

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